

# DEGENDRIFICATION OF MODERN ENGLISH

STEVEN CUSHING

North Easton, Massachusetts

One of the most important developments in the recent history of the English language has been the widespread elimination of the sexist suffix *-man* and its replacement with the sex-neutral suffix *-person*<sup>1</sup>. Words such as *chairman*, *mailman*, *milkman*, *German*, and *Doberman* have been increasingly replaced in common usage by such substitutes, respectively, as *chairperson*, *mailperson*, *milkperson*, *Gerperson*<sup>2</sup>, and *Doberperson*, in an attempt to minimize offensive sexual connotation. This phenomenon has spread so generally throughout the language that it is now possible to discern the beginnings of a new stage of development in which the sexist connotations of *-person* itself have been recognized and attempts made to deal with it. This suffix, after all, contains the gender-biased syllable *-son*, which is certainly as deserving of replacement as was *-man*. Some speakers began, for a time, to replace this syllable with *-child*, but this was soon recognized by the politically sophisticated as being ageist, though whether it was anti-youth or anti-elder was never definitively determined. Finally, *offspring* gained acceptance as a more appropriate substitute. We thus see such words as *chairperoffspring*, *mailperoffspring*, *milkperoffspring*, *Gerperoffspring*, and *Doberperoffspring* being used increasingly in the everyday vernacular, thereby entirely eliminating offensive sexual connotation and making the language easier to use and more pleasant to the ear.

One consequence of this development has been that the word *humanity*, which used to be viewed as a sex-neutral substitute for *mankind*, has had to be replaced, first with *hupersonity*, and then more recently with *huperoffspringity*, with the result that *human*, the generic term for a member of our species, has been replaced with *huperoffspring*. This, ironically, brings English back to its original Greek roots, *huperoffspring* being a direct derivative of *ὑπ' ἐρ οπλός* by Grimm's Law. *Huper-*, obviously, is just the Romanized spelling of the Greek prefix *ὑπ' ἐρ*, meaning "above" or "beyond," and *-offspring* derives from the Greek noun *οπλόν*, meaning "weapon," /p/ becoming /f/, /l/ becoming /r/, and /n/ becoming /ng/, in accordance with the above-stated law. The full Greek word *ὑπ' ἐρ οπλός* means, in English, "confident in arms, hence overweening, arrogant,"<sup>3</sup> and is thus fully synonymous with the English *huperoffspring*, which we saw above to be the correct scientific name for a member of our species.

Having thus purged our language of offensive sex-biased terms, we have also set the stage for the next development in the evolution of the species itself, namely the emergence of the *hupermensch* as predicted so prophetically by Nietzsche<sup>4</sup>. However, this term also contains a sexist syllable, namely *-men-*, and so must be corrected accordingly. Fortunately, since *men* is plural, we can replace it directly with *people*. We thus skip the stage of development in which *-person* replaces *-man*, thereby obviating the need for *-offspring*. This gives us *huperpeoplesch* as the scientifically correct and unbiased name for the next stage of biological evolution, which we, having just obviated the need for offspring, will not be around to see.

1. See, for example, the following articles in *American Speech*: D.E. Baron, "The Epicene Pronoun: The Word That Failed," 56:83-97; D.E. Count, "The Obscene Pronoun: The Word That Tried, Tried Again," 56:241-255; and D.E. Duke, "The Unseen Pronoun: The Word That Finally Succeeded," 57:321-336.

2. *Gerbil*, an informal variant of *gerwilliam*, "a small rodent related to the rat," has been successfully neutered by replacement with *gerpat*, a sex-neutral variant of either *gerpatrick*, "a former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations," or *gerpatricia*, "a feminine variant thereof."

3. Liddell and Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963, p. 734.

4. F. Nietzsche and Z. Thustra, *Ecce Huperhominid: A Dialogue*, Heidelberg, Topothemountain Press.

### QUERY

*George H. Scheetz, currently working on an article on words ending in -GRY, asks whether anyone can come up with a reference in print prior to 1975 of the well-known puzzle asking which three English words end in -GRY.*